

Humble Pacific island movie star Mungau Dain dies in mid-20s

By Nick Perry
The Associated Press

WELLINGTON, New Zealand — Mungau Dain had never considered acting before he starred in the Oscar-nominated film *Tanna*. He got the role because his elders decided he was the best-looking guy in their traditional village on the Pacific island nation of Vanuatu.

They would later describe him as their answer to Brad Pitt.

Dain died this month in the capital, Port Vila, after contracting a leg infection that wasn't quickly treated. He was in his mid-20s.

Martin Butler, who co-directed *Tanna*, said Dain wasn't a natural actor but was very enthusiastic, learned quickly, and ended up giving a fabulous performance. The movie won a number of awards, including two at the Venice Film Festival.

Dain is survived by his wife Nancy and two children. His village, Yakel, on Tanna island, remains in a traditional two-week mourning period.

Jimmy Joseph, the cultural director for Tanna island, said Dain was quiet, humble, and respected in Yakel, where he had chosen to remain living even after achieving some fame in the movie. He said Dain never drank or smoked.

People in the village typically chose to live as they have for centuries, in simple thatch huts and wearing nothing but grass skirts or a penis shield called a *nambas*. They raise crops and pigs, and observe a traditional way of life known as *kastom*.

But the village isn't completely isolated from modern



life. When villagers make the trek to the island's main town to sell the coffee beans they've grown or buy rice, they usually wear clothes. Some have cellphones, which they charge with small solar panels.

When Australia-based Butler and Bentley Dean decided to make the movie, which is loosely based on a true story, Butler said they quickly realized the village elders would be doing the casting. He said Dain looked too old for the role with his full beard, but 10 minutes later he'd shaved it off at their request.

He said he fondly remembers how awkward Dain was when trying to act in a scene in which he was supposed to lift co-star Marie Wawa in his arms and carry her along a river bed.

Butler said he and Dean plan to travel to Yakel at the end of the mourning period to join the village in

HUMBLE & RESPECTED. This September 9, 2015 file photo shows Mungau Dain in Venice, Italy. Dain had never considered acting before he starred in the Oscar-nominated film *Tanna*. He got the role because his elders decided he was the best-looking guy in their traditional village on the Pacific nation of Vanuatu. Dain died in the capital of Port Vila after contracting a leg infection that wasn't quickly treated. He was in his mid-20s. (AP Photo/Domenico Stinellis, File)

celebrating Dain's life.

"I was totally devastated. He was so fit and young and gorgeous. His wife is fabulous and the kids are great," Butler said. "He was a great example of how you can live a totally different type of life, and still be completely happy."

Location producer Janita Suter, who lived in Yakel for seven months during filming with her husband Dean and their children, said if there was an award for most improved actor, it would have to go to Dain. She said she doesn't think he'd even seen a movie before acting in one.

She said that when they travelled to Venice for the film festival, she was in her apartment when the chandelier and ceiling started shaking. It turned out it was Dain and the other villagers in the room above, stomping their feet in a traditional dance.

"He was a really proud ambassador for his people," she said. "It's a real loss."

She said Dain had been staying in Port Vila for the past couple of months as he tried to get a temporary visa to come to Australia and earn some money picking fruit. She said a doctor had explained that Dain got an infection in his leg that he didn't treat and by the time he was taken to the hospital he was unconscious and likely in septic shock.

Butler said he hoped there may be some way to get better information to people in Vanuatu about the risks of infections, and that Dain's death could act as a catalyst.

China says it exchanged data with NASA on the far side landing

By Yanan Wang
The Associated Press

BEIJING — China exchanged data with the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) on its recent mission to land a Chinese spacecraft on the far side of the moon, the Chinese space agency said, in what was reportedly the first such collaboration since an American law banned joint space projects with China that do not have prior congressional approval.

The space agency's deputy director, Wu Yanhua, said NASA shared information about its lunar orbiter satellite in hopes of monitoring the landing of the Chang'e 4 spacecraft, which made China the first country to land on the far side of the moon.

China in turn shared the time and coordinates of Chang'e 4's scheduled landing, Wu told reporters during a briefing on the lunar mission. He added that while NASA's satellite did not catch the precise moment of landing, it took photographs of the area afterward.

The state-run *China Daily* said it was the first such form of cooperation since the 2011 U.S. law was enacted.

NASA has not published any statements on the collaboration and could not immediately be reached for comment.

The lunar mission by Chang'e 4 and its rover, Jade Rabbit 2, was a triumph for China's growing space program, which has been rapidly catching up with those of Russia and the U.S. President Xi Jinping has placed space exploration among the country's national development priorities and the far side mission offered a chance for China to do something not done before by any other country.

The far side of the moon — the side which faces away from Earth — posed a challenge for scientists because it is beyond radio signals' reach. China set up a relay satellite in May to receive communication from Chang'e 4.

"In the past, we were always rushing to catch up to the advanced global standards" in space, said Wu Weiren, the chief designer of China's lunar exploration project.

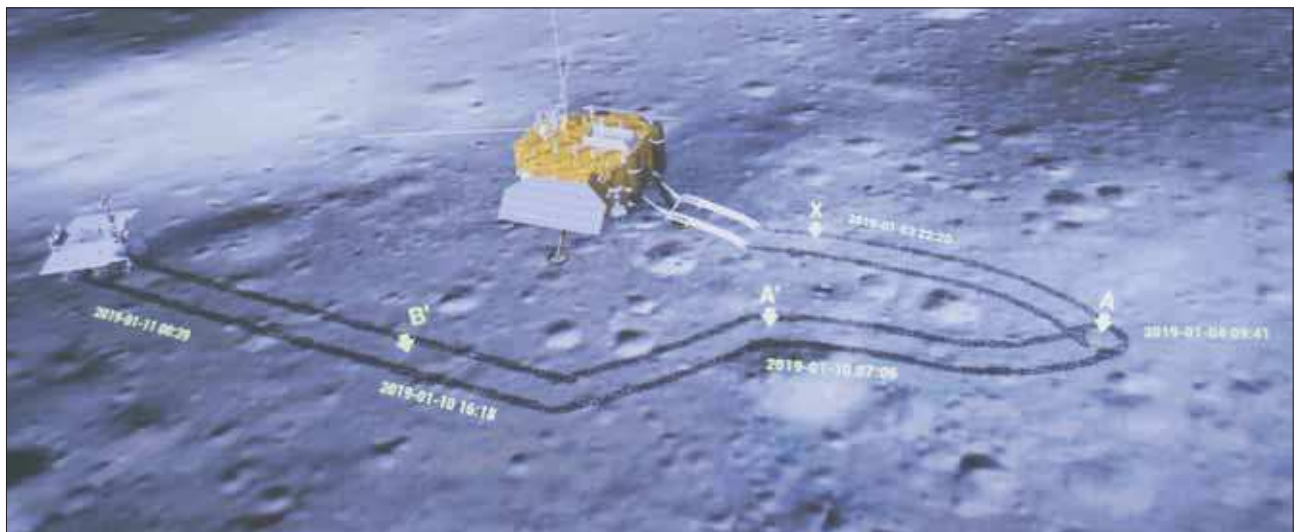
"There were many things to catch up on, and fewer things in which we could surpass others," he said. "With the probe of the far side of the moon this time, Chinese people have done very well."

Officials at the briefing declined to give specific figures on the costs of the space program.

Wu Yanhua said the Chang'e 4 was originally built as a "backup product" for Chang'e 3. He said the spending needed to refit it for its new objective was akin to repairing a short section of subway line.

Around the end of this year, China plans to launch Chang'e 5, which is to collect and bring back samples from the near side of the moon, the first time that has been done since 1976. Scientists are still researching whether to send Chinese astronauts, Wu said.

The country has also said that it will welcome scientists and astronauts from around the world to make use of its space station, which is slated for completion by 2022.



INFORMATION EXCHANGE. In this photo released by Xinhua News Agency, the screen at the Beijing Aerospace Control Center shows the lander of the Chang'e-4 probe, right, and the rover Yutu-2 (Jade Rabbit 2) taking photos of each other on Friday, January 11, 2019. China's space agency says it worked with the National Aeronautics and Space Administration to collect data from the far side of the moon. The state-run *China Daily* said it was the first such collaboration since 2011. (Jin Liwang/Xinhua via AP)

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