

lights out



Director's Statement

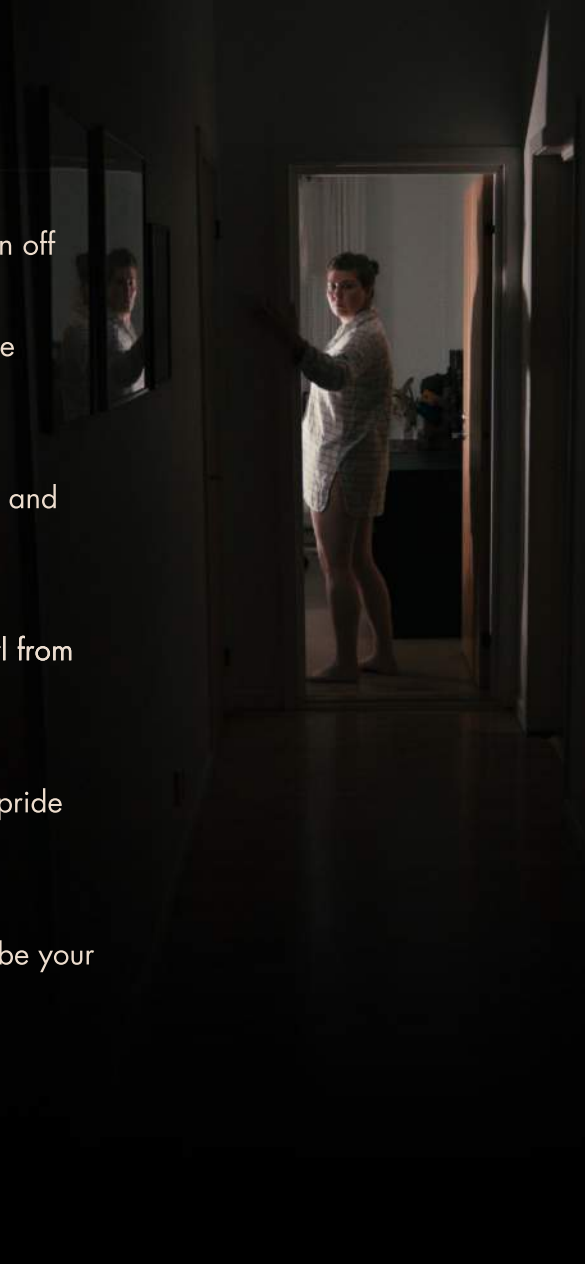
The initial idea for *Lights Out* came from a situation familiar to most people. You're at home late at night, you turn off the lights and in the corner of your eye the dark shadows turn into all kinds of monsters.

What if that pile of laundry actually was a monster though? What if your home, what is supposed to be your safe place, was inhabited by an evil presence just waiting for you to turn off the lights?

With a background in documentary work I've learned the importance of characters. The characters *are* the story and horror films in particular depend on characters that we are invested in. If we don't care, we don't scare.

Rebecca, the protagonist of the film, draws inspiration from the subject of one of my documentaries. A young girl from an unstable home who started cutting herself at age ten. When I first met her she hid her many scars under long sleeves. A year later she was adopted by her best friend's family. Finding herself in a loving and secure home environment she eventually started wearing short sleeves. Her scars no longer a thing of shame but a display of pride over how far she had come.

To me it all relates back to the idea of an unsafe home. If your home and family, the things that are supposed to be your oasis in a scary world, have been infiltrated by evil then where do you go?



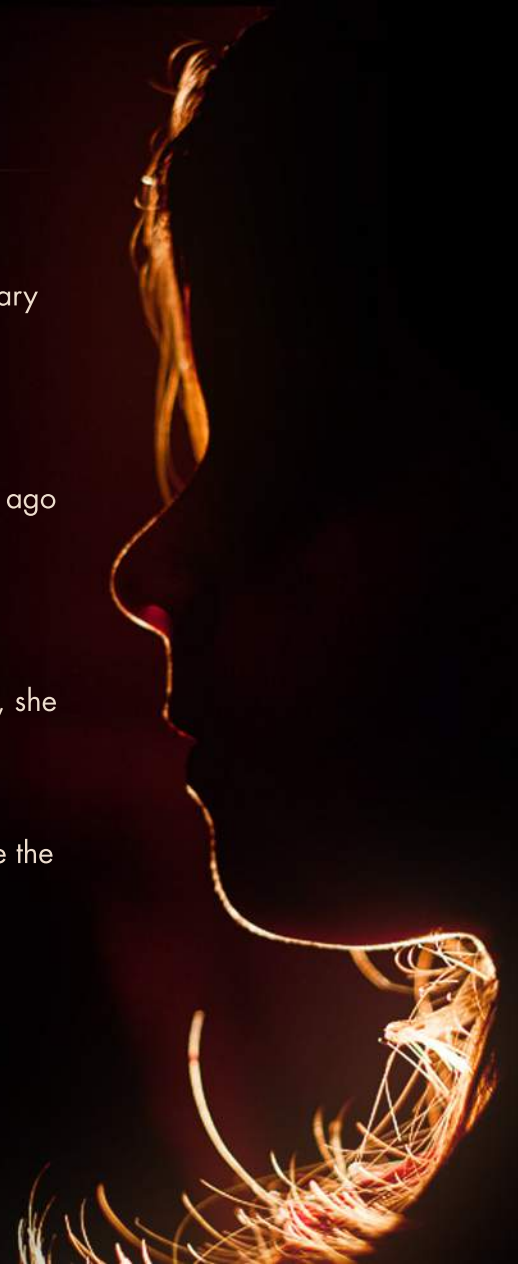
Synopsis

Rebecca had a difficult time growing up. Her father left and it was just Rebecca and her bipolar mother Sophie. While there were happy moments they were far outweighed by the bad. When Sophie started talking to an imaginary friend called "Diana" it was too stressful for Rebecca to handle. She started cutting herself and eventually ran away from home to get away from her crazy mother and her delusions.

Sophie eventually got better and started a new family but now bad things are happening once again. A few weeks ago Sophie's husband was murdered and now Rebecca is contacted by the school of her half brother Martin. He keeps falling asleep in class and the school has had a difficult time reaching Sophie.

Martin tells Rebecca that every night a scary woman appears in the house. She can't get you if you stay in the light, she only exists in the dark, and her name is Diana.

For the sake of her little brother Rebecca can't run away anymore. She has to go back home to her mother and face the demons of her past.



The Philosophy of Lights Out

"The 3 types of terror: The Gross-out: the sight of a severed head tumbling down a flight of stairs, it's when the lights go out and something green and slimy splatters against your arm. The Horror: the unnatural, spiders the size of bears, the dead waking up and walking around, it's when the lights go out and something with claws grabs you by the arm. And the last and worse one: Terror, when you come home and notice everything you own had been taken away and replaced by an exact substitute. It's when the lights go out and you feel something behind you, you hear it, you feel its breath against your ear, but when you turn around, there's nothing there..."

-Stephen King

Although I would certainly label myself as a horror fan it's terror that I enjoy and strive to invoke in an audience. Blood and gore I don't find scary. It's the threat of the horrible, the terror, that I find the most effective.

In the original short there are only two scares really, one in the beginning and one in the end. It was designed to start out with a scare to show the audience that they are not safe, something could come at them from the dark at any moment. Then we stay in that zone of lurking terror for as long as possible to make the audience squirm.

The scare is a form of release which is why I think it's essential to build up to it as much as possible and never to use it as a simple and cheap effect.

The Look & Sound

The camera in *Lights Out* is steady and deliberate. An objective and unflinching observer.

Handheld is not out of the question but it's only used when the shot calls for subjectivity and immediacy.

The lighting of the film is motivated by what is on screen. If the only light source on screen is a candle then that is the look we're aiming for. Darkness is danger in *Lights Out*. At every opportunity there will be dark areas of the frame that could be harboring evil. Characters find themselves stranded in a sea of black more often than not.

The score in the film will be characterized by restraint and more like unsettling sound design than traditional music.

Much like how the absence of light can hide unknown dangers a limited score can leave us vulnerable and lost.

The score will never telegraph scares but mostly stay in the background as a growing sense of unease.

Since much of the film will be hidden in the dark sound will play an important role. The sound is what gives us hints that we're not alone in the dark.

Feet trying to not make a sound, breathing attempting desperately to be controlled, the rustling of clothes even when an effort is made to stand perfectly still. The sound design and mixing will strive to bring out all the little details that you might not even think would be audible. The goal is to subconsciously impart the audience with a sense of super hearing so that they fear a loud scare more than anything.



Mood Board

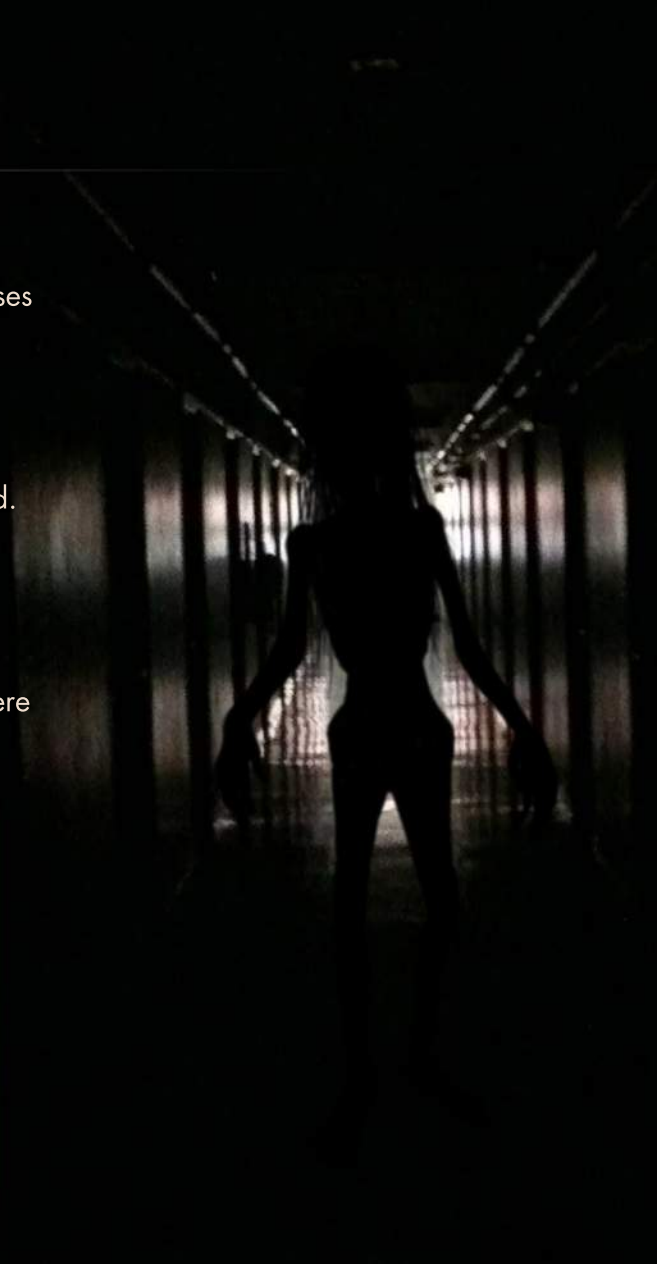


The Mechanics of Diana

Diana, the antagonist of *Lights Out*, exists on another plane from us and her link to our world is the darkness. In darkness she has a physical form, she has mass and she can interact with the environment. In light it's as if she ceases to be in many ways. She can't be seen and she has no way of interacting with the environment. She's absolutely powerless but her spirit is still present much like a traditional ghost.

The UV-light from a black light is the only source of light that doesn't make Diana go away, it keeps her in our world. The one way to hurt Diana is by keeping her in our world with the help of a black light and then hitting her with regular, full spectrum light. This has a burning effect on Diana.

In the film Diana will never be only partially lit, she will either be fully present or not. There won't be a situation where half of her body is visible, she's all or nothing.



Characters



Rebecca

Strong, outwardly confident, doesn't take shit from anyone but when Rebecca faces emotional issues she handles them in unhealthy ways. She has a history of cutting herself and scars cover her arms and legs. She avoids commitment and intimacy at all costs, afraid to get burned.



Martin

Rebecca's half brother. With an unstable mother, a recently deceased father and an absent older sister Martin has had to grow up faster than is healthy. Smart kid, resourceful and dedicated but with a lot of bottled up grief and sadness.



Sophie

Rebecca's bipolar mother. She and Rebecca have had good times together but they're far outweighed by the bad. Sophie sees herself as a victim. Bad things happen to her and people have a tendency to leave her. Even Rebecca ran away from home. As a defence mechanism Sophie can be quite cold.



Bret

Rebecca's boyfriend. A happy puppy personality and someone who is terrified of making enemies. He just wants everyone to get along. While you might not initially think it from Bret's somewhat messy Death Metal fashion sense he is a very responsible person.